

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEGUCI 03597 011541Z
ACTION ARA-14

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1073
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 3597

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SNAR, HO
SUBJ: MELGAR SEEKS PUBLIC SUPPORT

REF: (A) TEGUCIGALPA 3484, (B) TEGUCIGALPA 3044, (C) TEGUCIGALPA
A-8

1. CHIEF OF STATE GENERAL JUAN ALBERT MELGAR HAS IN RECENT DAYS UNDERTAKEN A SERIES OF MEETINGS WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF VARIOUS SECTORS OF SOCIETY. THE MEETINGS ARE AN ATTEMPT ON THE PART OF MELGAR TO GARNER PUBLIC SUPPORT IN THE FACE OF RUMORS CLAIMING DIVISIONS WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES THAT MIGHT LEAD TO HIS BEING DEPOSED.

2. THOSE RUMORS HAVE REACHED THE POINT IN RECENT DAYS WHERE TEGUCIGALPA DAILY "LA TRIBUNA" IN A JULY 29 EDITORIAL REFERRED TO PRESSURES FOR CHANGES AT A HIGH LEVEL INCLUDING IN THE AUTONOMOUS AGENCIES, AND CLAIMED SOME MILITARY OFFICERS HAVE THREATENED TO REMOVE MELGAR IF HE DID NOT ACCEDE.

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PAGE 02 TEGUCI 03597 011541Z

3. PUBLIC SECTOR STATEMENTS, SUCH AS THOSE FROM PRIVATE BUSINESS AND LABOR, HAVE BEEN GENERALLY SUPPORTIVE, BUT TINGED WITH THOSE GROUPS' SPECIAL INTERESTS (I.E., WAGE INCREASES, PROTECTION FOR INVESTMENT). ALL HAVE REITERATED SUPPORT FOR THE ELECTORAL PROCESS.

4. COMMENTING ON THESE MEETINGS, THE LIBERAL PARTY REPRESENT-

ACTIVE ON THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL, MIGUEL LARDIZABAL, SAID THEY WERE "UNNECESSARY"; THAT THE ONLY SUPPORT MELGAR NEEDS IS THE ARMY AND THAT AS A MILITARY RULER HE WILL STAY AS LONG AS HE HAS ARMED FORCES SUPPORT AND WILL LEAVE WHEN HE NO LONGER HAS IT.

5. COMMENT: IN ONE SENSE, THE APPARENT REASSERTION OF CONTROL BY THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL (SDC) IS A CONTINUATION OF PREVIOUS EFFORTS BY THE "LIEUTENANT COLONES GROUP" (REF C) TO CONSOLIDATE ITS POSITION. GROWING TENSIONS BETWEEN GENERAL MELGAR AND THE SDC HAVE BEEN EXACERBATED BY THE PUBLIC OUTCRY OVER HANDLING OF THE NARCOTICS SCANDAL, BUT REFLECT A BASIC DIFFERENCE OF APPROACH BETWEEN THE MORE "POLITICALLY" ORIENTED MELGAR AND AN SDC CONCERNED FOR INSTITUTIONAL PREDOMINANCE. THESE TENSIONS WERE A WELL-KEPT SECRET UNTIL RECENTLY. THEY NOW SEEM TO BE BECOMING INCREASINGLY PUBLIC, AND REVOLVE AROUND THE SDC'S DESIRE TO REMOVE MANY OF THE PERSONS NEAR MELGAR AND RE-ASSERT A CONTROL OVER THE GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL PROCESS THAT PREVIOUSLY THE SDC HAD BEEN CONTENT TO DELEGATE TO MELGAR. MELGAR HAS OBJECTED TO THESE DEMANDS AND IS MANEUVERING FOR TIME --AS THE PUBLIC MEETINGS SHOW--BUT, IF THE SDC IS DETERMINED, MELGAR MAY HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO SUBMIT OR RESIGN. AT THIS POINT TEMPER SEEMS TO HAVE COOLED SOMEWHAT, ALLOWING MELGAR TIME FOR A MANEUVERING TO SEEK A COMPROMISE.

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